



Wisconsin Elections Commission

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DATE: For the April 29, 2021 Commission Meeting

TO: Commissioners, Wisconsin Elections Commission

FROM: Meagan Wolfe, Administrator
Wisconsin Elections Commission

Prepared by Elections Commission Staff

SUBJECT: 2021 Four Year Voter Record Maintenance Process

1. Background

Wisconsin Statutes § 6.50 requires the Commission, no later than June 15th following a general election, to mail notices to all voters who have been registered to vote for the past four years but have not voted. The notice indicates that voters' registrations will be deactivated unless they request continuation of their registration within 30 days.

Voters who receive the notice can request continuation in several ways. The voter can sign and return the "Application for Continuation of Registration" section of the "Notice of Suspension of Registration" postcard. A written request for continuation of registration can also be made in person or sent by mail. A voter whose name or address has changed must re-register. The postcard directs voters who believe they received it in error to contact their municipal clerk or the Commission and provides voters with the Commission's toll-free number.

If the notice is returned as undeliverable or if the voter does not respond within 30 days, the Commission deactivates the voter's registration in the statewide voter registration system. Voters who are deactivated do not appear on the poll list on Election Day and must reregister in order to vote. Commission staff plan to complete this process on or before July 31, 2021. Returned postcards resulting in the deactivation of a registration (those marked undeliverable or indicating a change in status such as "voter deceased") are retained with the original voter registration documents until the expiration of the 4-year records retention deadline per Wis. Stat. §7.23(1)(c).

Not later than August 1, the Commission must post voter record maintenance statistics on the agency website. Wis. Stat. §6.50 (2r). The data must include:

- a. The total number of notices mailed.
- b. The number of notices returned as undeliverable.
- c. The number of notices that were returned requesting continuation of registration.
- d. The number of notices that were returned requesting cancellation of registration.

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- e. The number of notices returned with an indication that the named elector is deceased.
- f. The number of notices that were not returned.
- g. The number of electors who received notices and whose status changed from eligible to ineligible. Wis. Stat. §6.50(2r).

The full statistics from the 2019 mailing are available here:

<https://elections.wi.gov/publications/reports/2019-four-year-maintenance>.

2. Mailer Design History

Wis. Stat. § 6.50(1) requires the notice to electors to be in “substantially the following form:”

NOTICE OF SUSPENSION OF REGISTRATION

You are hereby notified that your voter registration will be suspended, according to state law, for failure to vote within the previous 4-year period, unless you apply for continuation of your registration within 30 days. You may continue your registration by signing the statement below and returning it to the office of the municipal clerk (mailing address and telephone number of office of municipal clerk or board of election commissioners) by mail or in person.

APPLICATION FOR CONTINUATION OF REGISTRATION

I hereby certify that I still reside at the address at which I am registered and apply for continuation of registration.

Signed

Present Address

If you have changed your residence within this municipality or changed your name, please contact the office of the municipal clerk (mailing address and telephone number of office of municipal clerk or board of election commissioners) to complete a change of name or address form.

[Office of clerk or board of election commissioners

Address

Telephone]

Earlier iterations of the four-year maintenance process, under the Government Accountability Board (GAB), adhered closely to the statutory language. These mail pieces produced a modest response (see Table 1 below) but also generated many calls from confused members of the public. Common questions included:

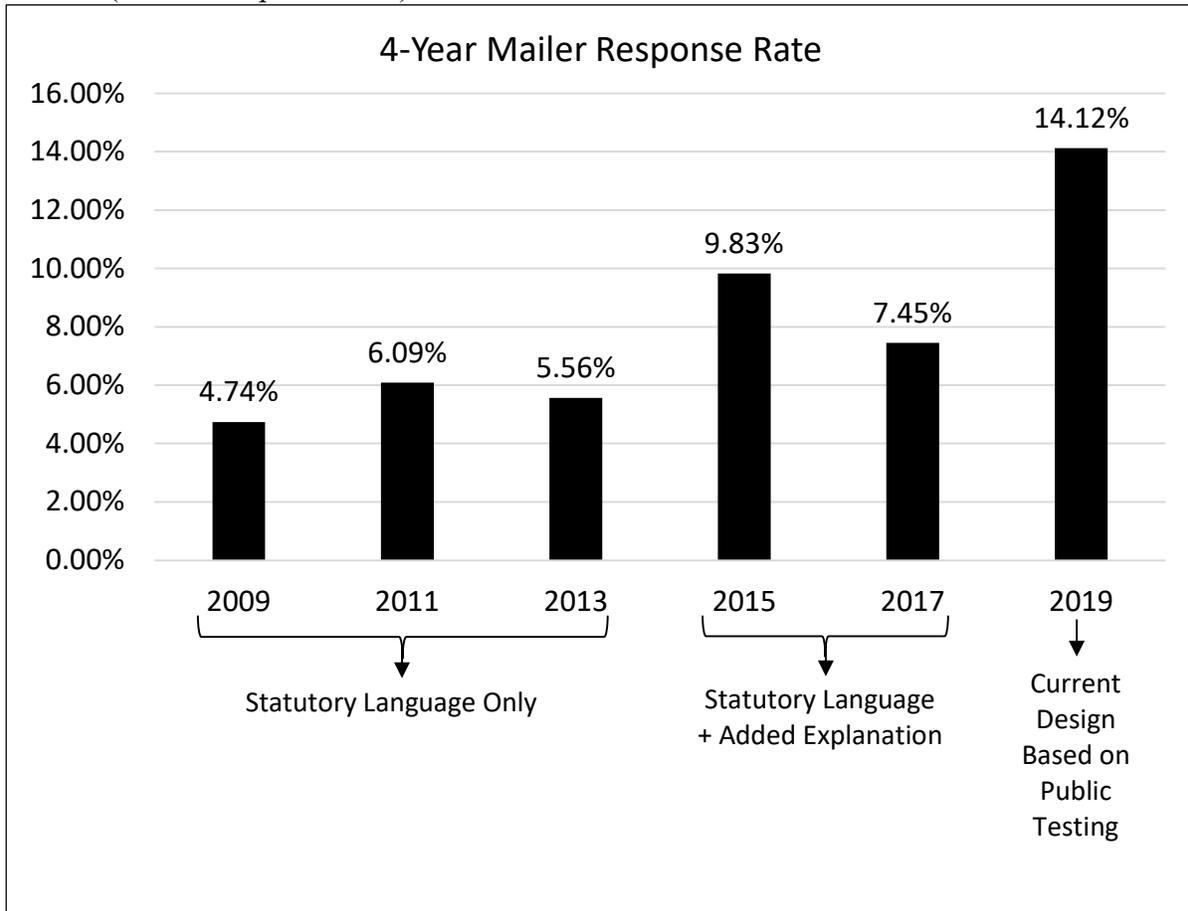
- a. Is the mailing an authentic communication from the State of Wisconsin?
- b. Why did I receive the postcard?
- c. Is this for my vehicle registration?
- d. How do I apply for continuation?
- e. Where do I return the continuation card?
- f. What if I moved? Was temporarily away? Went to school? Joined the military?

More recent iterations of the four-year maintenance process modified the post card design to improve the response rate, address voter questions, and reduce voter confusion. These more recent designs added the following elements to the boilerplate language contained in section 6.50:

- a. The “Official Election Mail” certification from the United States Post Office
- b. The Great Seal of the State of Wisconsin and the agency logo
- c. Voter registration numbers and bar codes to simplify data entry for clerks
- d. Supplemental language explaining the statutory requirement using common effective written communication principles
 - Short sentences with simple words
 - Affirmative statements using the active voice
 - Itemizing instructions
 - Short paragraphs

Most recently in 2019, Commission staff conducted public usability testing to evaluate and enhance postcard design based on feedback from real voters without prior exposure to the program. The usability testing sought to identify the postcard design elements that provided the highest levels of user comprehension and the lowest levels of confusion. This latest design produced the highest response rate recorded to date.

Table 1 (Mailer Response Rate)

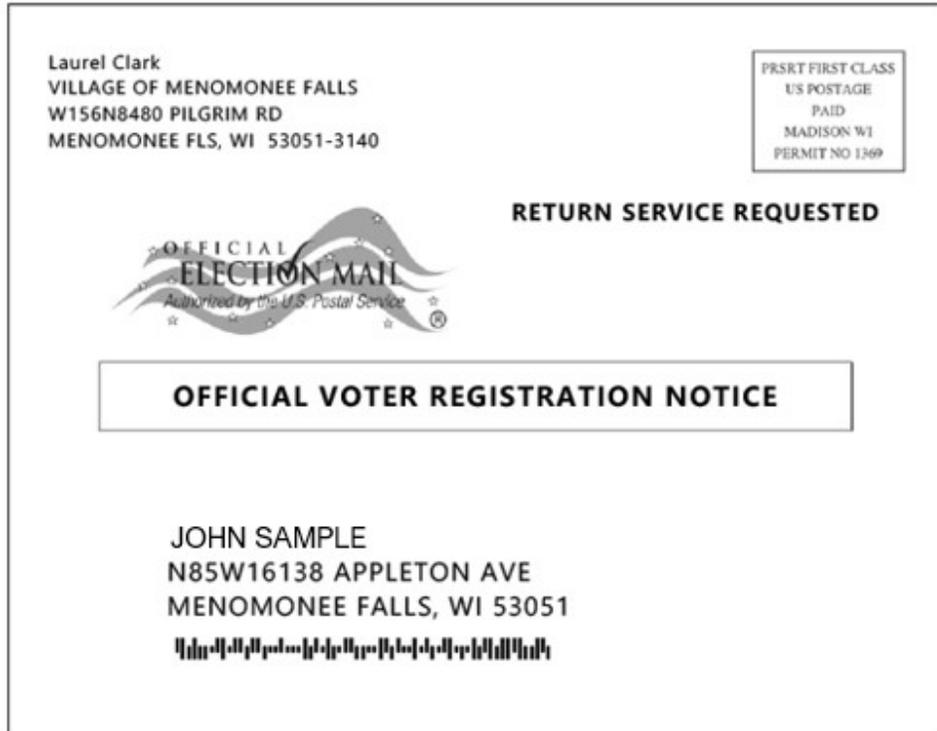


3. Proposed Mailer Design

Based on the 2019 response rate, staff propose using an updated version of the 2019 design that incorporates some new features. The proposed design maintains the successful elements of the 2019 concept while also incorporating suggestions made by Commissioners into the design. Specifically, the

proposed design will include color print, updates to language to make it clear the mailer is pertinent to voter registration and bolding and enlargement of important language. The proposed design also maintains the elements required by state statute.

Exterior Side 1 (Voter Address) – Graphics layout revised to conform to USPS requirements.



Exterior Side 2 (Notice) – Title revised to clearly state suspension risk. Color printing added.



Interior Side 3 (Optional Certification) – Color printing added.

	Keep Me Registered To Vote	
Still at the same address? You may use this card to stay registered.		
1. Sign the statement below.		
2. Return this card to your municipal clerk's office by mail or in-person by July 15, 2021 .		
I hereby certify that I still reside at the address listed below and want to stay registered to vote in Wisconsin.		
Sign X _____ Date ____/____/2021		
JOHN SAMPLE N85W16138 APPLETON AVE MENOMONEE FALLS, WI 53051-3047	MENOMONEE FALLS - WAUKESHA COUNTY 0009240857	 5 0 0 0 1 6 7 5 4 6

Interior Side 4 (Return Address to Clerk)¹ – Return IMB added.

	Return Postage Required
Laurel Clark VILLAGE OF MENOMONEE FALLS W156N8480 PILGRIM RD MENOMONEE FLS, WI 53051-3140	
	

¹ Note that the USPS does not allow the use of a business reply mail permit when returning to addresses other than the permit holder's address of record.

4. Proposed Timeline

The timeline for four-year maintenance is established by Wis. Stat. § 6.50(1) which states that the postcard must be sent to qualifying voters by June 15. To meet this mandatory deadline, a final design must be approved by the Commission at the April 29th meeting. This will allow staff time to finalize the image file and send to DOA printing and distribution in time for proofing, printing, metering, and mailing. Delays in approving a design or language on the postcard would jeopardize adherence to the statutory deadline.

2021 Four-Year Voter Record Maintenance Timeline

May 3, 2021	Finalize Mailing Design with DOA printing.
May 6, 2021 – May 14, 2021	Deadline for municipal clerks to enter participation for the Spring Election Wis. Stat § 6.275. Commission IT staff creates the list of voters identified as not having voted in 4 years after this date. List sent to DOA printing 5-6 weeks prior to the deadline for mailing the Notices of Suspension.
June 15, 2021	Statutory deadline for WEC to mail the Notices of Suspension of Registration Mailing is sent. Wis. Stat. § 6.50(1).
June 15, 2021 – July 15, 2021	Clerks deactivate voter records for notices returned as undeliverable and update the status of voters who request continuation of registrations from Active – Suspended to Active – Registered. Wis. Stat. § 6.50(2).
July 31, 2021	Commission IT staff run an automated job to deactivate any voters who have not requested Continuation of Registration. Wis. Stat. § 6.50(2). Fifteen additional days are allowed for clerks to process voter Requests for Continuation received by July 15, 2021.
August 1, 2021	Commission publishes the required statistics. Wis. Stat. § 6.50(2r).

5. Estimated Volume and Cost

A preliminary estimate of the mailing size indicates that 187,754 people qualify to receive the four-year maintenance mailer. Previous mailings varied widely in size from a low of 97,981 to a high of nearly 400,000. The majority of current voters eligible for the mailing are currently in Active-Registered status as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 (2021 Four Year Maintenance Status and Preliminary Count)

Voter Status	Count
Active Registered	150,070
Active Movers	37,672
Suspended	11
Presidential Only	1
TOTAL	187,754

Table 3 (Four Year Maintenance Volume History)

Year	Total Notices Mailed	Requested Continuation	Undeliverable
2021	187,754 ²	-	-
2019	113,314	15,974	30,342
2017	381,495	28,169	153,416
2015	97,981	9,610	25,179
2013	299,748	16,652	105,667
2011	240,505	14,636	52,418
2009	313,205	14,856	181,936

Final mailing costs will not be determined until the order is finalized; however, the 2019 mailing provides a reasonable approximation of expenses if the proposed mailer design is adopted. Total expenses in 2019 were just under \$0.37 per piece. The postcard rate has increased one cent since 2019. Therefore, applying a \$0.38 rate to the estimated 2021 volume yields a total estimated cost of \$71,347.³ The proposed design includes color printing which will not result in a higher cost.

6. Recommendation

Commission staff recommend approving the Proposed Mailer Design in section 3 of this report and the plan and timeline in this report. The following recommended motion options are included for the Commission's consideration. Both options are presented for the Commission's consideration and are presented to facilitate Commission discussion. Option 1 is included should the commission choose to accept the proposed mailer design and plan as presented. Option 2 is included should the Commission choose to modify either the mailer design or elements of the plan.

² Preliminary estimate

³ Postage comprises approximately 75% of the total mailing cost. Printing and handling account for the remaining 25%.

RECOMMENDED MOTION OPTION 1: The Commission authorizes staff to proceed with plans for mailing 4-year voter record maintenance notices to voters using the postcard designs and the schedule proposed in the April 29, 2021, staff memorandum.

RECOMMENDED MOTION OPTION 2: The Commission authorizes staff to proceed with plans for mailing 4-year voter record maintenance notices to voters with the following changes to the mailer design or language: